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Bring Back ROTC? No, Not At Harvard, Despite New Support

*Vietnam Did It In; 'Don't Ask,
Don't Tell' Sealed Its Fate;
Caspar Weinberger's Plea*

By John Hechinger, Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. -- Charles Cromwell, a Harvard University senior and student commander in the U.S. Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps, barks at a phalanx of fresh-faced cadets. "Battalion," he shouts. "Parade, rest."

The parade comes to rest obediently enough -- but not at Harvard. Banished from the campus for 32 years, Harvard's ROTC candidates must drill on the grounds of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, about a mile and a half away.



campus.

Calling the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon a "wake-up call," David Clayman, a member of the Harvard class of 1938 and chairman of a group called Advocates for Harvard ROTC, says he has gathered 800 signatures and expects thousands more in a petition to reverse the university's policy. Other

But even as Mr. Cromwell exhorts his cadets to prepare for new demands on the military following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, prominent Harvard alumni and donors are working to make the tragedy for the U.S. the springboard that will vault the ROTC back on

Harvard graduates enlisting in the battle include former secretary of defense Caspar Weinberger, now chairman of Forbes magazine; and Leo Kahn, a founder of Staples Inc.

In coming weeks, Mr. Clayman aims to present the petition to Harvard President Lawrence Summers. "The cadets have been treated as if Harvard wants nothing to do with them," Mr. Clayman says. "We don't want them to feel they have to be hidden anymore."

The movement to restore the ROTC at Harvard highlights how the terrorist attacks have revived old campus conflicts. Ever since the Vietnam War, the ROTC has been a lightning rod for critics of U.S. military policy. In 1969, Harvard's faculty voted to exile the ROTC because of Vietnam. In 1995, when the military's policy toward gays came under fire, faculty opposition deepened, and it voted to cut off all university funding to the program. Since then, alumni donors have ponied up \$150,000 a year to pay MIT's overhead costs for training Harvard students in MIT's ROTC program -- whose expenses are shared by the military and the university.

"The country is at war," Mr. Weinberger says. "The time has come for Harvard to recognize that military training is a valid part of an undergraduate education -- fully paid for in every way. Right now, the school is sending the message that military training is inferior and unworthy, something to be shunned."

Messages left for Mr. Summers were referred to Harvard spokesman Joe Wrinn. Mr. Wrinn says the school stands by its decision to ban funding for the ROTC because the military isn't in compliance with Harvard's policy forbidding discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The funding cutoff came after the Clinton administration declined to let gays serve openly in the military. Instead, the government instituted the controversial "don't ask, don't tell" policy, which bars the armed services from asking about the sexual orientation of recruits and prohibits

members from disclosing that they are gay. The alumni-financed MIT option was the result of a hard-fought compromise. "Anyone who goes to Harvard -- and wants to participate in ROTC -- can," Mr. Wrinn says.

As Harvard struggles with the ROTC, educators and students in recent weeks have been forced to revisit other painful questions that pit support for the armed forces against other American beliefs, such as freedom from discrimination and respect for privacy and civil liberties.

For now, nonviolent sentiment seems to have the upper hand. Two weeks ago, after the terrorist attacks, about 150 campuses, including Harvard, the University of California at Berkeley and Duke University, staged peace rallies, holding placards that read "War is also terrorism," "Give peace a chance," and "War kills civilians, not terrorists." At Berkeley, about 2,000 demonstrators carrying placards stared down a few hundred flag-waving counter-protesters. At Harvard, about 500 people gathered for a peace rally, while, just last week, only 50 people showed up at a "patriotism rally" sponsored by campus conservatives.

The alumni move is the strongest yet to restore the ROTC, but it faces an uphill battle. In 1999, Harvard's Undergraduate Council voted to encourage the administration to return the program to campus, saying Harvard has a moral responsibility to help train soldiers and shouldn't discourage high-school students seeking scholarships from attending Harvard. But the vote was nonbinding, and the school took no action.

Like many students, Daniel DiMaggio, a Harvard sophomore from Carmel, N.Y., calls the military's attitude toward gays ridiculous and remains staunch in his opposition to campus ROTC. "That fact isn't changed [just] because it is a time of crisis," he says.

Warren Goldfarb, a Harvard philosophy professor and one of the founders of the Harvard Gay and Lesbian Caucus, says that the fight against terrorism shouldn't erode progress in fighting bias. "What's the difference if ROTC is at this campus or two subway stops away?" he asks.

Such views leave some cadets dispirited. The students, who get as much as \$20,000 a year in scholarships under the program, train up to 10

hours a week and pledge four years of active military service. At MIT, they gather in a training center where the signs in the hallway read: "Freedom is not free" and "Honor, valor, sacrifice."

Mr. Cromwell, the Army student commander, says he will never forget one day during his freshman year when he marched proudly in his dress greens at a formal ROTC ceremony, to the strains of a military band. A dozen or so protesters yelled profanities, with one holding a sign that read: "We're looking for a few good queers."

Since then, Mr. Cromwell says he has had to put up with icy stares from his classmates and others as he made his way to MIT. "It made me feel uncomfortable walking around in uniform."

When Brian Smith, a Harvard senior in the Air Force ROTC, recently grabbed a flier for the patriotism rally, he says a classmate peered at the handout and said, "Gag me."

Gabriel Mendel, 21, a Harvard senior in Army ROTC, says he was taken aback recently when, walking in uniform through Harvard Square, he heard words of encouragement -- not from a student, but from a homeless man in fatigues who said he was a Vietnam veteran. "It's good to see someone serving his country," the man said. "Sometimes, you wish you could find that kind of support at Harvard," Mr. Mendel says.

Enrollment in the ROTC, which has held steady in recent years, is down sharply from its peak during the Vietnam-era draft. At the Army ROTC, the largest program, 28,470 students were enrolled nationally in the fall of 2000 -- one-sixth the number in the mid-1960s.

A number of other private universities, including Yale, Stanford, Columbia and Brown also banished the ROTC from their campuses in the 1960s and 1970s. Officials at these schools say they know of no movement to bring it back.

Jerry Hill, ROTC adviser at Yale, says students in Air Force ROTC have to



drive about 75 miles to the University of Connecticut at Storrs. "It's a real hassle for the kids," he says.

At Harvard, 43 students in the Army, Navy and Air Force ROTC generally hop the bus at least two or three times a week to train at MIT. The cadets figure they spend an extra three hours a week in transit.

"It's frustrating to go to school here sometimes," says Mr. Smith, who slips on his freshly pressed uniform every Monday morning at 5:20 to travel to MIT. His father was a helicopter pilot in Vietnam, and his grandfather flew for the Air Force in World War II. "I come from the Midwest," notes Mr. Smith, who hails from Lee's Summit, Mo. "If I were at home right now, there wouldn't be academic debates. People would be rallying around the military."

Despite an expectation of renewed interest in the ROTC on campus after the Sept. 11 attacks, Lawrence Obst, 22, who graduated from Harvard last year and now works as an ROTC recruiter, isn't permitted to make his pitch at his alma mater. When he wants to send a flier, he can't visit Harvard and stuff mailboxes. Last year, he had to use \$500 from the ROTC budget to mail information to about 1,600 freshmen -- while permitted student groups including the Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transgendered Supporters Alliance, the Harvard Boxing Club, and the Harvard Global Peace Project can all solicit for free.

"I run into all these roadblocks, and I don't appreciate it," says Mr. Obst, who expects to work as a combat engineer after his recruiting stint. "The Army needs the best and brightest. Who better than Harvard to lead the nation into battle?"